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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000392

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP, DRL
NSC FOR J.BADER AND E.PHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: YUDHOYONO CONSIDERS REPLACING ACEH MILITARY
COMMANDER

REF: A. JAKARTA 223

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 337 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Cameron R. Hume, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Medan.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY. President Yudhoyono is struggling with how and when to replace the hardline Aceh Regional Military Commander, Major General Sunarko. The only question is whether this happens before or after the April 9 national legislative elections. The GOI would prefer a more conciliatory commander who can work with Aceh Governor Irwandi Yusuf.

[1](#)3. (C) SUMMARY (Con'd): Sunarko, a former Army Special Forces (Kopassus) officer, holds strong views that the largest local party of former Acehnese separatists, Partai Aceh, is a threat to break Aceh away from Indonesia. Many believe his command is inflaming tensions in Aceh in the run-up to sensitive national and local legislative elections and that replacing him would defuse the situation. The decision on whether or not to remove Sunarko before the elections is politically sensitive for Yudhoyono. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)4. (C) President Yudhoyono realizes that the presence of Major General Sunarko (one name only) as Aceh Regional Military Commander is exacerbating an already tense political environment (ref B). Former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, who met with Yudhoyono during his February visit to Indonesia (ref A), told the Ambassador he has reliable information that Yudhoyono wants to replace Sunarko before the April elections. Other sources tell us that Sunarko will be replaced but that Yudhoyono is struggling with the timing and that it might not happen until after the elections. A clear indication of Yudhoyono's view of Sunarko was Sunarko's place at the dais during Yudhoyono's recent speech in Banda Aceh: Sunarko was at the end of the table, after the governor and the wives of officials. Yudhoyono's speech also clearly called on both the military and Partai Aceh (PA) to keep the peace.

[1](#)5. (C) The military and the militias are however using controversial tactics in their attempts to unite former GAM factions. Since Sunarko took over from the previous commander, who had a gentler touch, he has instituted policies which significantly worsened relations between security forces and former separatists. He has ordered harassment of former GAM and the establishment of new security posts and checkpoints, which ex-separatists see as forms of intimidation. A witness reported to ConGen Medan that two motorists in Bener Meriah were detained by

vigilantes and then moved to a military checkpoint where they were assaulted.

¶6. (C) Sunarko has assigned former Kopassus to lead at least three district military commands to supplement the more overt harassment and some sources allege he is supporting former anti-GAM militias (although there is no proof). Witnesses have also seen members of the military tearing down PA campaign posters in several sensitive districts.

¶7. (C) Sunarko is a former Kopassus officer and extreme nationalist indoctrinated in the 1950s philosophy of the armed forces having the paramount role in protecting Indonesia's territorial integrity, according to retired Lt. General (Ret) Agus Widjojo, an advisor to Yudhoyono and a military-reform proponent. While Sunarko cannot be directly linked to any gross human rights violations, he has had command positions in several hot spots. According to his own CV, he was an officer in East Timor in 1991, a district commander in East Timor in 1996-97 and served in Aceh in 2002-03. In July 2000, when he was a commander of Group I of Kopassus in Serang, a city near Jakarta, Kopassus troops allegedly killed a radical Muslim preacher.

¶8. (C) In a conversation with a confidential source, Sunarko clearly expressed his distrust for Partai Aceh, showing the source volumes of evidence of PA's separatist actions. He told her the 2005 Peace Agreement MOU was the "biggest fraud ever perpetuated on Indonesian people," and that if PA takes control over the local legislature, Aceh will be separate within five years. Yudhoyono undoubtedly plans to replace Sunarko to help forestall such an eventuality -- the only

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question at this point is the timing.
HUME